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Ousia in Metaphysics VII and VIII: A Syntactic Study

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Ὀὐσία in *Metaphysics* vii and viii: a Syntactic Study

Aristotle moves indifferently between syntactically differentiable uses of '*Ὀὐσία*' throughout *Metaphysics* vii and viii: (i) one is free-standing, where '*Ὀὐσία*' is used as a substantive, and readily admits of a plural, '*Ὀὐσίαι*'; (ii) the other is dependent upon an accompanying genitive for its completion, and admits of a plural only in a parasitic way. It is often thought that his ease of movement between these two uses implicates Aristotle in a kind of confusion, or indeed, in several kinds of confusion. The questions:

(1) What is the *Ὀὐσία* of x?

and

(2) What is *Ὀὐσία*?

ought to receive different kinds of answers. Taken extensionally, answers to (1) ought to carve out a class of essences, where non-substances no less than substances might be thought to have essences; taken in the same way, answers to (2) should present a list of the successful candidates for substantiality, where, trivially, nothing in any non-substance category merits a mention. Similarly, taken intensionally, answers to (1) should specify the nature of the *Ὀὐσία* of some thing or things, where this will turn out to be the essence of those things, with no immediate restriction on the range of potential essence bearers (e.g. Socrates is essentially a human being; blue is essentially a color); taken in this way, though, answers to (2) should specify the nature or essence only of those things which qualify as members of a restricted class of entities, those in the category of substance, which includes Socrates but not blueness.

Scholars have wanted to connect the answers to these questions in a variety of different ways. More to the point, Aristotle himself evidently connects the dependent and free-standing uses of '*Ὀὐσία*' in striking ways, in both *Metaphysics* vii 6 and 17. The cogency of his doing so depends in part upon how these distinct uses are conceived by him. By the same token, the various scholarly proposals about their connection are best assessed against the backdrop of a fairly neutral survey of the linguistic data of Aristotle's most concentrated inquiry into *Ὀὐσία*, the middle books of the *Metaphysics*.

A full text version will be posted on my web-site, after 15 December.

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